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PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBO #0383/01 0361921
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 051921Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6894
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 8625
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 1615
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 6958
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 2970
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 7663
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/FBI WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 000383

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/05/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PTER](#) [MASS](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR FEBRUARY 9-13 VISIT OF AMBASSADOR
JACKSON MCDONALD AND DCA DELEGATION

REF: A. 2008 BOGOTA 1797
[1](#)B. 2008 BOGOTA 4083
[1](#)C. 2008 SECSTATE 128033

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Brian A. Nichols for reasons 1.4
(b and d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) The signing of a new defense cooperation agreement (DCA) with the United States is a priority for President Uribe. The current negotiations come at a time when the GOC is eager to cement the historically solid U.S.-Colombian bilateral relationship under the new U.S. administration. The GOC and Colombian people hold positive views of the United States, and Colombia sees itself as an unwavering ally in an Andean region increasingly hostile to U.S. values and goals. The GOC views the negotiation of a new defense agreement between the United States and Colombia as a key in deterring potential regional threats, but also remains sensitive to domestic and regional considerations regarding the U.S. military presence in the region. The GOC negotiating team appears to have internal divisions over goals and negotiating tactics, and during the talks the GOC may seek security guarantees we are unwilling to offer in the DCA agreement. End Summary.

GOC NEGOTIATING POSTURE

[1](#)2. (C) Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos, and Foreign Minister Jaime Bermudez support strong bilateral ties, and see a new defense agreement as a critical component of our relationship. The GOC increasingly views Venezuela as a threat, especially given recent Venezuelan arms purchases from Russia, and views a defense agreement with the United States as a deterrent to possible Venezuelan aggression. On several occasions, Minister of Defense Santos has alluded to the airlift of supplies from the United States to Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur war and has requested similar "assurances" from the USG in the event of a conflict with Venezuela. The language in Article IV of the October 23 Colombian counterproposal requesting an aerial defense system and security guarantees in the event of a threat to Colombia's national security reflects this concern. We have communicated the U.S. position on the aerial defense system to senior GOC officials (per reftel C), but expect the issue to be raised during the negotiations.

13. (C) Despite their enthusiasm for the agreement, GOC officials stress that the agreement should avoid provoking regional and domestic sensitivities to an enhanced U.S. military presence. They have noted that any agreement should avoid use of the word "base" and should be linked to earlier bilateral and multilateral agreements to avoid the need for Colombian congressional approval. Senior Colombian officials have repeatedly stated their intent to avoid an agreement that would require Colombian congressional approval. While Colombian Executive Branch officials strongly support a DCA, some opposition politicians and opinion leaders have already spoken out against the possibility of "moving the Manta Base to Colombia." The text of the GOC October 23 counterproposal is generally consistent with these stated concerns (see ref tel B). For example, the GOC deleted the status of forces agreement (SOFA) language and instead links privileges and immunities (P&Is) to the earlier 1974 agreement titled "Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Colombia Concerning an Army Mission, a Naval Mission and an Air Force Mission of the United States of America Armed Forces in the Republic of Colombia" (commonly known as the "1974 Agreement").

GOC TEAM DYNAMICS, DIVISIONS

14. (C) The GOC technical negotiating team of approximately 20 members will be led by Deputy Foreign Minister Clemencia Forero. Two of the three Vice Ministers of Defense, Sergio Jaramillo and Juan Carlos Pinzon, will also participate. The GOC team will also include three additional members from the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), including Patricia Cortes (Coordinator for the Office of U.S. and Canadian Affairs), and approximately a dozen others from the Ministry of Defense (MOD). We expect there to be tensions between the MFA and the DOD about the defense agreement--with the MFA being more concerned with not antagonizing Colombia's neighbors and more sensitive to national sovereignty concerns, and the MOD generally favoring a more robust military relationship with the U.S. There are also fissures within the MOD team, with some favoring a broader agreement with expressly stated defense "guarantees" from the USG, and others favoring a more narrow, technical agreement. It remains to be seen which of these internal GOC views will prevail during the negotiations.

REGIONAL TENSIONS

15. (C) The Government of Ecuador broke diplomatic relations with Colombia after the GOC's March 1, 2008 bombing of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) Commander Raul Reyes' camp in Ecuador, and has yet to resume ties. Relations with Venezuela have improved somewhat following recent meetings between Presidents Uribe and Chavez, but Venezuelan support for the FARC--as evidenced in the computers found at Raul Reyes' camp and GOC concerns that Venezuelan authorities allow the FARC to move drugs and arms across the border--contributes to continued tensions. In May 2008, following a speculative piece in the Colombian daily "El Espectador" that suggested the Manta "bases" would be moved to Colombia, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez warned the GOC against the approval of a "gringo base" in La Guajira, Colombia--saying he would consider this an act of aggression. Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos replied that, "I would tell those criticizing this information to become better informed, because there will be no base" (see ref tel A). The GOC is eager to keep the upcoming negotiations out of the media spotlight.

REGIONAL AMBITIONS

16. (C) In addition to a bolstered relationship with the United States, Colombia also seeks to play a greater role in the international security architecture, as evidenced by its willingness to contribute troops to NATO in Afghanistan and the Sinai Multinational Observer Force. Despite initial

skepticism, in July 2008 Colombia opted to participate in the South American Defense Council, under the framework of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), following assurances from Brazilian President Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva that the Defense Council would operate by consensus. Colombia provides anti-narcotics training to police in Mexico, Panama, the Caribbean and other nations. Mexico is benefiting from Colombia's experiences fighting narco-traffickers, and Presidents Uribe and Felipe Calderon are seeking to institutionalize and deepen counter-narcotics cooperation. We expect the GOC to make available the expertise developed in combating the FARC and narco-trafficking groups for international peacekeeping efforts and other international security activities in the years ahead, although financial constraints will remain an issue.

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